DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 343 083 CS 010 854

AUTHOR Fear, Kathleen L.; And Others
TITLE A Critical Analysis of Collaboration within Professional Development Schools.
PUB DATE Dec 91
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference (41st, Palm Springs, CA, December 3-7, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College School Cooperation; *Cooperation; Curriculum Development; Educational Research; Elementary Education; Higher Education; Literacy; Professional Development
IDENTIFIERS Empowerment; School Culture; *Teacher Researcher Cooperation; *Teacher Researcher Relationship

ABSTRACT

A study examined the dynamics of the exchange of knowledge frames that lead to empowering participation for teachers and researchers, in the context of a professional development school serving elementary students of varied backgrounds. The subset of professional development school faculty who participated in the study were 2 school faculty and 3 university researchers who made a 10-year commitment to developing collaborative partnerships. Narrative data from the steering committee meetings and field notes focusing on curriculum planning served as reference points from which to critique experiences and the evolution of empowering participation. University researchers met with teachers to co-plan and co-teach literacy projects and to revisit and critically analyze experiences and field notes at the end of the third year. Results indicated that, from the start, teachers and researchers were not equal--although researchers initiated a process to begin to think with teachers, status hierarchies limited equal participation. Findings suggest that researchers need to understand local cultures by describing problems and needs with teachers, and that teachers and researchers need to learn how to become co-learners and to participate in a "cogenerative dialogue." (Fifteen references are attached.) (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED343083

Kathleen L. Fear
Education Department
Albion College
Carter Education Center
Albion, MI 49224
(517) 629-0320

Patricia A. Edwards
Teacher Education Department
Michigan State University
330 Erickson Hall
East Lansing, MI 48824

Laura Roehler
Teacher Education Department
Michigan State University
258 Erickson Hall
East Lansing, MI 48824

A Critical Analysis of Collaboration Within Professional Development Schools

Running Head (Collaboration Within PDSs)

CS010854

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

K. Fear

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A Critical Analysis of Collaboration Within Professional Schools

Teachers and researchers depended on each other to generate together their understanding of school reform. This paper contains examples from a multi-year project to describe the process of building a democratic learning community. Researchers describe how empowering participation evolved by analyzing the dynamics of the exchange of knowledge frames. Achieving collaboration through participation between the insider, the teacher, and the outsider, the researcher, depended on understanding the political and social culture within the local school. The case presented here examines the processes of reflecting in action and reflecting on action within a Professional Development School.

Throughout the country a consortium of 100 American research universities that make up the Holmes Group share a commitment

> ...to making teacher preparation more rigorous and connected to liberal arts education, to research on learning, and teaching, and to wise practice in the schools (*Tomorrow's Schools, The Holmes Group, 1990).*

To accomplish this mission, many Holmes Group members have established working partnerships at elementary and secondary professional development school ("PDS") sites. At the heart of the professional development school concept is the principle of community building through collaboration, where participants assume responsibility for learning within a democratic learning community. The concept of learning from and within the field through community building is currently studied by social science researchers in various settings. For example,

moving back and forth between the principle and the action of learning community building was analyzed by Elden and Levin (Whyte, 1991). This analysis provided a useful framework for understanding, analyzing, and critiquing community building experiences within collaborations at PDSs.

One critical feature of this framework is an assessment of the presence of empowering participation. Participation is described as a "powerful but slippery concept" by Elden and Levin, who point out that participation is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for democracy. They begin to explicate empowering participation by defining a "cogenerative dialogue." A cogenerative dialogue is the exchange of information from different frames of reference. Insiders and outsiders operate out of knowledge frames so that all participants assume a stance toward knowing. The teacher has insider knowledge that is a direct result of experience within a particular locale. The researcher has outsider knowledge that is described by Goldenberg and Gallimore (1991) as propositional or "all else being equal." According to Goldenberg and Gallimore, "propositional knowledge (or, "research knowledge") that is derived from scientific research cannot have a direct bearing on practice because it is oblivious of compelling local issues..." (p. 2). They cite Sarson (1990) in describing how traditional models were in essence non-collaborations.

> We have had a surfeit of educational research ... that is subject to the criticism of being informed by a most superficial comprehension of the contexts in which educational problems or phenomena arise. [This becomes

> a] cause for worry ... when the conclusions of research become the basis of action in seemingly similar contexts ... you *apply* the conclusions, you *deliver* the knowledge, you *perform* the operation as if the object of it is a passive, anesthetized patient. (p. 129)

In traditional models of collaboration researchers were invited to identify research findings that had some bearing on problems that were identified by teachers. In these invitational models researchers failed to identify compelling local issues that framed teacher thinking and consequently drove practice within local contexts. Carine (1988) criticizes these traditional invitational models saying that "...one day workshops or brief 'add on' activities that last a few weeks [are not sufficient]" (p. 60). He proposes that "improving instruction in ...elementary schools requires...down to earth staff training programs that meet teachers' and students' immediate needs" (p.60). Carine suggest that staff training programs should intensive and sustained over a long period of time.

One of the first promising models for responding to teachers' instructional needs was introduced by Corey almost 40 years ago. Corey's "action research" model for collaboration united teachers and researchers in their efforts toward meeting teachers' and students' immediate needs. Unfortunately, at the time Corey's ideas on collaboration had little impact on a research community emersed in quantitative methodologies. Within the last few years, a number of researchers have been involved in successful collaborative research arrangements with school district personnel (Allen, Combs, Hendricks, Nash, and Wilson, 1988; Oakes, Hare, and Sirotnik, 1986; Lester and Onore, 1991; Shanklin and Rhodes, 1989). Harste (1989) believes that "Unlike the old model of education

research--in which the researcher gathers a great of data but the classroom says the same--in these projects everyone grows." However, researcher and teacher growth needs to be examined to understand the collaborative nature of these projects.

Very little is known about how variation in school cultures, personnel, organizations and historical knowledge effects researcher and teacher collaboration. We are beginning to understand how variations in specific contexts "wreak havoc" on attempts to apply general research findings to specific sites (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991; Huberman, 1987) and how scientific research actually finds its way into schools and classrooms of schools that are different from the contexts of the original research (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991; Comer, 1980, 1987). However, it is often unclear how community building through collaboration evolves over time. The focus of this paper is on describing the dynamics of the exchange of knowledge frames that lead to empowering participation for teachers and researchers.

Participants. The subset of professional development school faculty who participated in this study were school faculty and university researchers that made a ten year commitment to developing collaborative partnerships. Two university researchers and two teachers were involved in a one year of planning and a second and third year of teaching and collaboration at one professional development site. During the second year, a third university researcher joined the PDS site to focus on home-school partnerships which surfaced as a topic during the planning year.

This PDS school site serves elementary students who come from distinct communities: the inner city, a nearby trailer park, and neighborhoods surrounding the school. Children and families from these communities differ along many dimensions; socioeconomic status, background,

experience, interest in and concern with education.

Data Sources. Narrative data from the steering committee meetings and field notes focusing on curriculum planning served as reference points from which to critique experiences and the evolution of empowering participation. The framework that was used to assess the degree of participation was developed by Elden & Levin (1991). Nine criteria, developed by Gustavsen (1985) and based on the philosophical thinking of Habermas, were used to stimulate discussion:

1. The dialogue is a process of exchange: points and arguments move to and fro between the participants.
2. All concerned must have the possibility to participate.
3. Possibilities for participation are, however, not enough: Everybody should also be active in the discourse.
4. As a point of departure, all participants are equal.
5. Work experience is the foundation for participation.
6. At least some of the experience which each participant has when he or she enters the dialogue must be considered legitimate.
7. It must be possible for everybody to develop an understanding of the issue at stake.
8. All arguments which pertain to issues under discussion are--as a point of departure--legitimate.
9. The dialogue must continuously produce agreement which can provide a platform for investigation and practical action.

Teachers and researchers use the above framework to reflect on experiences and define empowering and disempowering events, dialogues, and situations that occurred throughout the three years with PDS staff members.

Procedures. University researchers met with teachers to revisit and critically analyze experiences and field notes at the end of the third year of PDS involvement. Teachers and researchers examined specific examples from the original field notes to document, reexamine and clarify examples of empowering participation. Then researchers met to categorize issues that were

recorded during the teacher/researcher meetings. Field notes that were analyzed during the third year contained exact dialogue and summaries of planning meetings from three consecutive years.

During the first year of the PDSs, a steering committee met weekly with university researchers to establish shared understandings and plans for professional development activities. In addition to meetings at PDS sites, researchers met on a weekly basis at the university with program directors to process and coordinate plans.

During the second and third year, reseafchers met with teachers to co-plan and co-teach literacy projects. Each week the researchers met with teachers to discuss their concerns about student progress and plans to involve parents in the literacy support of their children. In these weekly meetings, teachers discuss why it was important to involve parents in their children's education, especially when the children are considered "at risk" for failing. The purpose of these groups was to create a dialogue between researchers and teachers around literacy. In addition, researchers and teachers met with the entire elementary staff to listen to invited speakers and to discuss school-wide professional development activities during monthly extended lunch sessions.

Unequal Participation and Unequal Status

From the start teachers and researchers were not equals. Researchers interested in the Professional Development School concept met with teachers in an elementary school to express their desire to work collaboratively. Researchers initiated the process of exchange by discussing the importance of building a school learning community and indicating a need to share a vision for improving teaching and learning. Although researchers initiated the process in order to begin to think with teachers, status hierarchies limited equal participation. Collaboration was the agenda of the

researcher who had historically grounded status as well as the desire to set collaboration as an agenda.

Teacher responses to the researchers' agenda uncovered local conceptions of collaboration and local conceptions about status differences among the teachers. Initially, teachers who had expressed an interest in collaborating with university researchers and the rest of the staff, decided to consult with their colleagues and make a list of needs that they felt would help them to teach both their students and student teachers. For example, some teachers stated that they needed ditto paper and additional copies of reading basal manuals for their student teachers. The request for supplies came from some teachers while other teachers expressed concerns about "at risk" students and interests in teaching methods such as cooperative learning. Researchers began to understand the culture of the school through conversation about why and how certain materials and resources would improve literacy instruction. The unintended effect of initial meetings was the uncovering of perceptions of status differences among the teachers. Higher status teachers' requests had been heard by the administration and the university. Their requests earned them rewards, such as student teachers and administrative responses to problems. Researchers realized that they were a part of reinforcing the existing status ordering by responding to teachers who were interested in topics similar to their own research interests.

For example, status differences could be traced back to initial meetings when the whole school was invited to collaborate. Two teachers who had positive experiences working with individual researchers from the local university in the past, volunteered to participate with faculty during the planning year. These teachers were considered higher status teachers from the start. Comments

shared by the principal, other teachers and these two teachers indicate that they were perceived as "the leaders" in the school. On the other hand, two teachers were asked to collaborate because the principal saw this as "an opportunity to help them to grow." Although the opportunity to participate was offered to all teachers, the initial planning team was made up of two teachers who saw themselves as holding higher status and two teachers who had been asked to lead because of perceived deficits and lower status. The status differences on the team were not discussed openly at first. However, researchers and teachers agree that implicit understandings about status differences may have been a catalyst that lead to more equal participation.

Legitimation of Teachers' and Researchers' Issues

The higher status teachers heard and helped to legitimate the issues raised by the lower status teachers. For example, when one teacher raised the issue that "the University had used teachers" in the past, this issue was acknowledged by both researchers and teachers. The teacher that raised the issue was asked by the team to explain and monitor this problem. Researchers made plans so that teachers lead group discussions at a university sponsored summer institute on this topic. From the teacher's point of view, empowering participation included moving outside the classroom to discuss issues, such as leading faculty groups, and planning and presenting ideas. As such, the researcher's role was to try to find places to "consider legitimation." Researchers did not empower by legitimating issues. Instead researchers created a legitimating environment for teachers. As researchers we had inadvertently encouraged unequal participation. Our concern for collaboration had placed teachers' issues first. Our issues had not been legitimated by the community. Initially, we were hell-bent on listening because we did not want to impose a packaged research agenda. We

wanted our purposes to be teachers' purposes and their purposes to be ours. We want our responses to be genuine. However, it wasn't until we dealt with our status differences that the dialogue began to "move to and fro between participants" and more equal participation emerged.

The turning point in opening up the dialogue occurred when together we confronted the issue of status ordering. It began when higher status teachers were criticized by other teachers for having time away from the classroom "just to talk." Researchers were criticized for talking with some teachers, for not acting, and for not building community. We expressed our need to hear first and our perception that this was not valued by the teachers. One teacher said, "Yes, we were working with the University. Yes, they told us the sky was the limit. But there is a limit to where the sky goes." We repeatedly confronted the conception that our role as researchers was to provide resources and packaged ideas. We challenged the conception that teachers' roles were to act on our plans. We were open in stating that we needed time to hear and to be heard, and to value each other. We needed to figure out what was worth valuing in each other and then to discuss what we could contribute and what we wanted to contribute and did not want to contribute. When we discussed our roles and status and why some teachers were perceived as higher status, the status ordering changed. For example, teachers described the mixed blessing of having researchers who have specialized research interests and influential position.

T1: It sort of evolved that PDS is all about "teaching for understanding." I think that's something I have always done.

T2: But if I don't have those things (smaller class size and counseling), we are not reaching the kids that are the reason we are doing this in the first place.

T1: But I had to settle down to understand that I wasn't going to get a lower class size, that I was not going to get some help to deal with these children. The University came out and said, "We have this man who is into computers and really wants to do computers in our class."

Teachers challenged researchers' traditional roles as "professional sense-maker" and questioned what Brathen (1988) refers to as the researchers' "model monopoly" (Elden & Levin, 1991). As researchers we had specialized research interests and we held positions so that in a sense our analysis of educational problems dominated the dialogue. Empowering participation included exposing and overcoming problems that were caused by the researcher "model monopoly." Researchers perceived empowering participation as a given rather than an agenda in itself. After three years of working together teachers stated that they had little experience in carrying out or thinking about the importance of shared agendas. Teachers pointed out problems with learning about their roles in contributing sources of expertise. Researchers pointed out problems with assuming equal participation without understanding how privileged positions within the existing culture limited the cogeneration of the dialogue.

The third researcher who joined the collaboration during the second year tells her story of the struggle to convince teachers that her questions, rather than answers, were a critical beginning.

> *When I entered the elementary school community, there were all of these expectations that I could move mountains because I was quote "the expert." Being thrust into this position, I felt precipitated a lot of jealousy and hostility aimed at me. It was almost as if I was in a damn if you do, and damn if you don't situation. After the teachers developed a collaborative atmosphere with other researchers for second a year, they were unwilling at first to help me understand the local community. Again, I was quote "the expert", and*

experts are supposed to know everything. I am an expert on family/intergenerational literacy, but I was not an expert in this local context. I was struggling to understand the local context so that I could more effectively utilize my skills to bring parents, teachers, and children closer together in the community. As a researcher, I was viewed as an outsider by the teachers and principal. They viewed me as being bossy when I asked questions. I viewed my role of asking questions as a way of entering the community.

In our weekly meetings, I was trying to ask teachers to share with me "Why they thought parents needed to be involved?", "What did they want them to do if they became involved?", and "How what they wanted parents to do connected to their classroom practices?" These three questions were problematic for the second-grade teachers. What they failed to realize was that I was struggling to understand their local context. The more I probed them, the more they though we were floundering.

Teachers asked this researcher to "fix the parent involvement situation" at their school without helping her to understand and/or change her views of parent involvement within their local context. She tried to communicate to teachers Joyce Epstein's (1987) notion that traditional approaches were characterized by "...high rhetoric and low practice" and that "parent involvement means different things to different people (Ascher, 1987). Similarly, researchers at this PDS site struggled to gain credibility when they attempted to understand teachers' initial frameworks. In all instances it was necessary to convince teachers that they were experts in their particular situations. We needed to clarify and to describe our mutual dependence by stating that the teachers, the insiders, had an interest in solving specific practical problems while researchers, the outsiders, had an interest in solving particular problems in particular ways. We needed to affirm that local theories were as important as theories composed by research

communities.

Conclusion

The professional development school is a powerful site for educational reform. However, teachers and researchers who work together at these sites can be disempowered. In many cases it can be virtually impossible to be genuinely egalitarian when working in schools if conceptions of traditional models of collaboration are not challenged. Researchers need to understand local cultures by describing problems and needs with teachers. Teachers and researchers need to learn how to become co-learners and to participate in a "cogenerative dialogue."

At the PDS site described in this paper, creating a "cogenerative dialogue" was clearly the agenda of the researchers, however, both teacher and researcher learned to meet and name the world and status hierarchies so that the knowledge generation proceeded under local control. Uncovering obstacles to equal participation was important because teachers and researchers were working toward building democratic learning communities. We found that the process of exchange of knowledge frames was facilitated when we began to learn how to criticize and trust the intentions driving our own criticism. Participation meant that researchers needed to participate. Sharing the complexity of planning together and the mutual dependence between teachers and researchers were sources of empowerment for each of us. In order to develop a collaborative learning community, committed to sharing new knowledge and practice, it was important to understand and critically analyze experiences from various points of view. The ambitious enterprise of encouraging conversation, interpretation, criticism, voice and participation can only be accomplished when participants acknowledge that they inevitable come

to the inquiry with personal interests and different status positions.

The prospect of reforming literacy instruction in PDS schools depends on better understanding the exchange of information between researcher knowledge frames and local knowledge frames and the dynamics of this exchange. The more we understand how this exchange evolves, the more likely it is that researchers can have an effect on the nature of school reform. In our research the exchange was critical. The lessons that we learned might generalize to other groups of researchers and teachers who are attempting to improve literacy instruction through a collaborative combination of researcher knowledge and teacher knowledge.

References

Allen, J., Combs, J., Hendricks, M., Nash, & Wilson, S. (1988). Studying change: Teachers who become researchers. Language Arts, 65(4), 379-87.

Ascher, C. (1987). Improving the school-home connection for poor and minority urban students. Institute for Urban and Minority Education, New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Carine, D. (1988). How to overcome barriers to student achievement. In S.J. Samuels and P.D. Pearson (Ed.), Changing school reading programs. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association.

Comer, J. (1980). School Power: Implications of an intervention project. New York: Free Press.

Comer, J. (1987) New Haven's school-community connections. Educational Leadership, 44(6), 13-16.

Corey, S. (1953). Action research to improve school practices. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Elden, M. & Levin, M. (1991). Cogenerative learning: Bringing participation into action research. In W.F. Whyte (Ed.), Participatory Action Research. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Epstein, J.L. (1987). Parent involvement: State education agencies should lead the way. Community Education Journal, 14(4), 4-10.

Goldenberg, C. & Gallimore, R. (1991). Local knowledge, research knowledge, and educational changes: A case study of early spanish reading improvement. Educational Researcher, 20(8),2-14.

Gustavsen, B. (1985) "Work place reform and democratic dialogue." Economic and Industrial Democracy, 6: 461-479.

Harste, J. (1989). New policy guidelines for reading: Connecting research and practice. Urbana: NCTE.

Huberman, M.(1987). How well does educational research really travel? Educational Researcher, 16(1), 5-13.

Lester, N. & Onore, C. (1991). Learning change: One school district meets language across the curriculum. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Oakes, J., Hare, S., & Sirotnik, K. (1986). Collaborative Inquiry: A congenial paradigm in a cantankerous world. Teachers College Record, 87, 545-561.

Shanklin, N. & Rhodes, L. (1989). Transforming literacy instruction. Educational Leadership, 46(6), 59-63.